DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 873 CG 017 128

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TITLE Validity of 42-Item Mooney Problem Check List Scale for Counseling.
PUB DATE Aug 83
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (91st, Anaheim, CA, August 26-30, 1983). Best copy available.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; *Counseling Services; Higher Education; Individual Needs; Interpersonal Relationship; Life Satisfaction; Personality Traits; *Predictive Validity; *Predictor Variables
IDENTIFIERS *Client Characteristics; *Mooney Problem Check List

ABSTRACT

Studies employing the Mooney Problem Check List (MPCL) have found that counseling center clients indicate more problems on the MPCL than nonclients. Domino and DeGroote identified 42 MPCL items concerned with self-satisfaction and a need for social contacts which further differentiated counseling seekers from nonseekers. In order to further validate the 42-item MPCL as a predictive instrument, three studies were undertaken. In Study 1, 40 students (24 male, 16 female) were administered the MPCL upon entering the university. During the course of their college careers, 20 students were seen in counseling; the other 20 students served as controls. Student responses to the MPCL were classified according to the 42 identified items. An analysis of the results showed the classification system correctly identified all controls but only 2 of the 20 counseling seekers. However, the items did significantly differentiate the two groups. In Study 2, 74 students (37 counseling seekers and 37 controls) were administered the MPCL, and their responses were classified according to the 42 items. An analysis of the results, as in Study 1, showed that the items differentiated the two groups, but failed to predict counseling seekers from nonseekers. In Study 3, scores from the second study were recalculated to improve the predictive accuracy of the 42-item MPCL. Cutoff points of 11 and 5 for counseling seekers were set. An analysis of the results showed that the cutoff point of 5 was significant in classifying counseled from noncounseled students. The studies validated the usefulness of the 42-item MPCL in predicting who will seek counseling. However, separate norms should be developed at each university. (BL)

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Validity of a 42-Item Mooney Problem Check List Scale for Counseling

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CG 017128

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Abstract

Three studies used a 42-item Mooney Problem Check List scale to establish cutoff points differentiating counseling seekers and nonseekers.

Validity of a 42-Item Mooney Problem Check List Scale for Counseling

A number of studies have sought to differentiate college students who seek counseling from those who do not (Bruch, 1977; Cooke & Kiesler, 1967; Kleinmuntz, 1960; Parker, 1961; Rossman & Kirk, 1970; Roth, 1963; Schneider & Berdie, 1941). With one exception (Tryon, 1978) studies employing the Mooney Problem Check List (MPCL, originated by Mooney & Gordon, 1950) have found that counseling center clients indicate more problems on the MPCL scales than nonclients (Doleys, 1964; Domino & DeGroote, 1978; Palladino & Domino, 1978).

Domino and DeGroote found 42 MPCL items which differentiated counseling seekers from nonseekers at a private university. They cross-validated the 42-item scale on two groups of state university students by administering the MPCL to a group of 26 students who were in long-term counseling and to a group of 26 students who were not in counseling. The 42 items statistically differentiated the two groups.

The 42 items are concerned with self-dissatisfaction and a need for greater social contacts. These problems are familiar complaints of most students in personal distress who seek counseling. The items come from 8 of the 11 MPCL scales as follows: Health and Physical Development - 6 items (item nos. 1, 3, 5, 58, 111, 112), Social and Recreational Activities - 7 items (item nos. 13, 15, 68, 69, 70, 125, 234), Social - Psychological Relations - 4 items (item nos. 71, 126, 130, 185), Personal - Psychological Relations - 8 items (item nos. 21, 22, 23, 76, 78, 186, 243, 297), Courtship, Sex, and Marriage - 6 items

(item nos. 26, 27, 82, 83, 85, 194), Home and Family - 4 items (item nos. 31, 196, 255, 306), and The Future: Vocational and Educational - 2 items (item nos. 46, 156).

The present series of studies was conducted to further validate the 42-item scale as an instrument which can be used to differentiate between students who seek long-term counseling and students who do not seek counseling. These studies were concerned with cross-validating the scale, finding optimum cutoff points to differentiate counseling seekers and nonseekers, and using the 42-item scale to classify students into those who would seek long-term counseling and those who would not.

Study 1

Method

Subjects. Each year entering freshmen at a private, Eastern university are given a battery of tests during freshman orientation on a voluntary basis. The MPCL is one of the tests used, and approximately 600 of a class of 1,000 freshmen are tested annually. Students are encouraged to come to the counseling center for test feedback whenever they wish, and approximately 400 students request feedback during the course of their college careers. About half of these students request counseling with from 10% to 20% of these students staying on for relatively long-term counseling (10 or more sessions).

The present sample consisted of 40 students (24 males and 16 females) who were tested during the summer of 1973 and who graduated in 1977. Twenty students (12 males and 8 females) had been seen in counseling during the course of their college careers for 10 or more sessions. These 20 students represented

the entire population of students from the Class of 1977 who both took the MPCL and were seen in long-term counseling. An additional 20 students who had been tested but never came to the counseling center for either feedback or counseling were selected to serve as controls. Each control student was matched with a counseling student according to sex and first initial of last name.

Procedure. The total number of problems from the 42-item scale endorsed by each student was tabulated. Each student was then classified according to the means and standard deviations provided by Domino and DeGroote. All students scoring above and one standard deviation below the mean for Domino and DeGroote's counseling group were classified as counseled students. All students scoring below and one standard deviation above the mean for Domino and DeGroote's control group were classified as control students. Specifically, students endorsing from 22 to 42 problems were classified as counseled students while students scoring from 0 to 21 were classified as controls.

Results

This system of classification resulted in the correct identification of all controls, but only 2 of the 20 students who received counseling were correctly identified. A t test for independent samples revealed that the 42 items did significantly differentiate between the two groups ($t(38) = 3.06$, p .001).

Study 2

Perhaps the reason that the 42-item MPCL scale failed to correctly classify people who would later receive counseling and those who would not was that

Domino and DeGroote's norms were based on a very different sample of students than the sample used in the present study. Students in Domino and DeGroote's study came from a large, state university while those in the present study came from a smaller, private university. Students in the present study generally came from traditional, conservative families where admission of problems was often seen as a weakness. It is not surprising, therefore, that they endorsed fewer problems than state university students. It was felt that the items would be better predictors if a new set of norms more appropriate to the present population was developed.

Method

Subjects. Seventy-four students who had been tested during the summer of 1972 and graduated in 1976 were used as subjects. Thirty-seven of the students (19 males and 18 females) had received ten or more sessions of counseling during their college careers. These students represented the entire population of students from the Class of 1976 who both took the MPCL and were seen in long-term counseling. Each of the 37 control subjects was matched with a therapy subject according to sex and first initial of last name and had never been to the counseling center during college.

Procedure. The norms developed on students in the Class of 1977 were used to classify the counseling-seeking behavior of students in the Class of 1976 in the following way: The means and standard deviations of the MPCL scale scores for the two groups in Study 1 were computed. The counseling group obtained a mean of 11.4 and a standard deviation of 6.6 while the control group obtained a mean of 6.0 and a standard deviation of 4.9. The distributions overlapped making it impossible to use the two means and their standard deviations as norms.

Therefore, it was decided to make the cutoff point midway between the two means. Subjects endorsing 9 or more items were predicted to have received counseling while those scoring 8 or below were predicted to be controls.

Results

As was the case in Study 1, the 42 items differentiated between the two groups ($t(72) = 3.31$, p .001). The Class of 1977 norms resulted in correct classification of only 21 of the 37 students from the Class of 1976 who had counseling and 23 of the 37 controls yielding an insignificant chi square ($\chi^2 (1) = 2.66$, $p > .05$).

Study 3

Method

In an attempt to improve the predictive accuracy of the 42-item MPCL, the cutoff point between the predicted counseling and control groups was recalculated two additional ways. First, the predictability of the 42-item MPCL scale was assessed when the cutoff point was the mean for the Class of 1977 control group plus one standard deviation. Class of 1976 students scoring 11 or above were predicted to become counseling clients. Second, the predictions were recalculated using the mean of the counseling group from the Class of 1977 minus one standard deviation as the cutoff point. Class of 1976 students scoring 5 or above were predicted to become counseling clients.

Results

When the cutoff point was 11 or above for students who would seek counseling, 33 Class of 1976 control subjects (89%) were correctly classified and only 4 controls (11%) were incorrectly classified. However, only 16 counseling clients (43%) were correctly identified while 21 (57%) clients were

incorrectly classified as controls. This method of classification yielded a significant chi square (χ^2 = 22.48, $p < .001$), but too many counseling clients were incorrectly predicted to make it a useful classification.

When the cutoff point was 5 or above for students who would seek counseling, 29 clients (78%) and 23 controls (62%) were correctly classified while 8 clients (22%) and 14 controls (38%) were incorrectly classified. This method of classification yielded a significant chi square (χ^2 = 12.49, $p < .001$). Table 1 presents the various cutoff points used in all of the present studies to classify counseled and noncounseled students.

Insert Table 1 about here

Discussion

The 42-item MPCL scale seems to be a useful tool for the counselor. Students in the present studies who came for counseling during their college careers endorsed significantly more of the items when they were given the test as freshmen than students who never came for counseling.

The cutoff point used in Study 3b was the most useful with the present group of students. Seventy-eight percent of the students who sought long-term counseling during their college careers endorsed five or more of the 42 items. This finding is impressive given the relatively long interval between the testing and when the students came for counseling. The 42-item scale could prove useful in predicting who will come for long-term counseling at other colleges and universities. Separate norms should be developed for each university.

The 42-item MPCL scale could help in counseling outreach programs. Students scoring above the cutoff could be identified early and invited to counseling. Since not all students who need counseling seek help from counselors (Tryon, 1980), this procedure may also assist students who need help but who otherwise might not seek it in coming to the counseling center.

In summary, the 42-item MPCL scale is useful in predicting students who seek long-term counseling during their college careers. The items can also be of assistance in counseling outreach programs.

Table 1

Number of Counseled and Control Students Classified Correctly in Studies 1, 2, and 3

	Counseled Students	Control Students
Study 1		
22 - 42 items for counselees	2/20	20/20
0 - 21 items for controls		
Study 2		
9 - 42 for counselees	21/37	23/37
0 - 8 for controls		
Study 3a		
11 - 42 for counselees	16/37	33/37
0 - 10 for controls		
Study 3b		
5 - 42 for counselees	29/37	23/37
0 - 4 for controls		

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